THE AFTERGLOW

THE pastor's visitor—a woman—was facing the ultimate problems. Her husband had gone in his prime, and she was left with four children to rear.

"If I could only understand the meaning of it," she said, "if there were any gain to be got by the sacrifice, if just one faint ray of light would shine through the darkness, I think I could adjust myself to the situation. But I can't be sure that God is in it, that it isn't just the cold ploughshare of fate running impersonally through my wee mouse's nest and shattering it without knowledge or pity."

"Mary," said the minister, "you have come upon one of the inscrutable things of life. It's as old as the human race. Men have been asking to have the meaning of their experiences made clear ever since calamity came into the world. They have been crying unto God, like Moses, 'Show me thy glory,' and the only answer is the answer that Moses got: to be placed in a cleft of the rock while God passed by, and to see his back after the event was over. That is the only revelation that is vouchsafed to men, the afterglow of God. As the event passes the light shines in. 'What I do,' says Jesus, 'thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.'

"It is true of us," continued the minister, "as it was of Moses, that we cannot look into God's face and live. It is a mercy that God covers our face with his hand until the experience is past. If we could see it all in a flash it would blind us. Our ignorance, our limited experience, our scanty moral appreciation of highest things make it necessary that God should show us only the afterglow, the receding glory. We can grasp God neither with our heads nor with our hearts. Our standards of judgment are very different from God's. We desire to be happy; God wishes us to be holy. Many of the events that seem so final and important to us are incidents that count for little in the eternal reckoning. Hence the apparent indifference and even cruelty of the divine dealings with us. But we gradually *grow* toward insight. After God has passed by we see his back. We do not need to go back a great way to see that we have outgrown many of our early aims and to smile at some of our early sorrows. But they looked like final things then!

"We are not wise enough to choose for ourselves, or to understand the meaning of an event until we get a long perspective on it. The only safe revelation of God is the one given *after* the experience has been lived through—the glory of the afterglow. The problem for us, Mary, is not so much that of having our experiences explained, —that may come in the kindly providence of God, or it may never come at all,—but to be educated through our experiences. The legitimate cry to God is not, 'Show me thy glory!' but a prayer to be made patient enough to wait until we can see from the dark cleft of our experience some glory of God as He departs, and meanwhile to remember that this God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who so loved the world that He gave his Son to redeem it. In his hands we are safe. He will justify himself when the time comes."

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